

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2011

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goat Transplant Endorsement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Trap and transplant of bighorn sheep and mountain goats is an effective management tool. The removal of sheep and/or goats assists population control and transplanted animals can ultimately represent new populations or augment existing populations. While trap and transplant efforts are not meant to replace hunter harvest, in some areas harvest is insufficient for local population control but cannot easily be increased. For example, hunters may target easily accessible subgroups of migratory sheep to potentially negative ends while helicopter netgunning can be considerably more selective and dispersed in capture efforts.

Bighorn Sheep

- For next winter (likely January 2012), Wild Horse Island in FWP Region 1 has been tentatively identified as a bighorn sheep source population. Others may be recognized based upon late fall 2011 field survey efforts. A new release site in Region 3 near Lewis and Clark Caverns is proposed to be explored on public and private lands. There are also potential releases to additional winter ranges near or adjacent to currently utilized winter ranges in the upper Madison (HD 302 sheep population) and Bitterroot valleys (between HD 250 and 270 sheep populations). There may be other population augmentations based on recent surveys. Funds from auction licenses will be available for these efforts as/if they move forward. All animals will undergo a health assessment at capture.

Mountain Goat

- Ten to 20 mountain goats may be available from HD 313 in January 2012 for capture and transplant. A potential release site for 2012 is currently not identified. If a potential site is identified for 2012, it will be presented to the Commission at that time.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Recent comments from the public and FWP Commission have made it clear that many value bighorn sheep ewe harvest above out-of-state releases. Comments have also resulted in in-state releases prioritized in the recently adopted [Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy](#). To these ends, ewe licenses have been reasonably increased and other Montana release sites may be identified or become available in the future. Should the commission endorse these proposed efforts, a formal public review process will be initiated for new releases and reintroductions. Any final commission endorsement would only come after this formal public review process has been completed. Augmentations of existing populations may take place without further public review or process.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends endorsement of these potential transplants for winter 2012 (likely January). They represent a reasonable management tool in combination with hunter harvest. New releases and reintroductions will undergo further public process and review.

Proposed Motion

I move the FWP Commission endorse these potential augmentations and explorations of new releases or reintroductions as presented by FWP.